

My Vacation by Dan Bernstein

Nowhere. And nothing. That's what I've been up to for two weeks. Went nowhere. Did nothing. This was my idea of a vacation, but the few people I've spoken to in the last 14 days have trouble with the concepts of "nowhere" and "nothing." "So where are you going?" one man asked me on Day 2. I told him I had no plans. "Gone anywhere yet?" he asked a week later. I told him I hadn't. He seemed distressed. He was obviously thinking: This guy should go somewhere. "You're on vacation and you haven't gone anywhere?" asked a woman just back from a pile of ruins in Guatemala.

My wife, who spent the last two weeks commuting to Orange County, took every opportunity to tell me how she would spend my vacation. I won't go into detail, but I would have needed a building permit. Except for a colleague who advised me to "take lots of naps," everyone to whom I have spoken about this vacation has expected me to account for myself: "Did you work in the yard?" "Did you visit relatives?" "Did you fix anything?"

The assumption is that, when vacationing, something must be achieved. Better to take a train, derail, and be stranded for days than to go absolutely nowhere and do absolutely nothing. At least a derailment is an adventure; an adventure is an achievement. This cultural obsession with achievement, advancement, and progress impels people to interpret even the most obvious example of doing nothing as an overt, affirmative, pre-meditated act. At the beginning of my vacation, I stopped shaving. What do you think people said to me? "You're growing a beard!" When hair appears on a man's face, people are much more comfortable with the belief that he is growing a beard than the prospect that he has stopped shaving. Growing a beard suggests that a man has a goal, that he is trying to do something. Not shaving is threatening. It's doing nothing. People have trouble with that.

It is not easy to do nothing, and I can't claim total success. In fact, I spend a half hour needlessly doing something: obtaining a smog exemption for my '71 Subaru. Then I went home and took a nap.

Despite my aggressive sloth, I occasionally felt the need for cultural enrichment, which may explain why I suspended doing long enough to visit the mall. After two weeks, I'm convinced I have a future in doing nothing. But I have far to go. Fortunately, I have a role model. I've never seen anyone do nothing the way my dog does nothing. He slept through my two weeks at home, shrewdly conserving his energy for those infrequent, yet demanding, periods that require him to be awake and fully alert for up to 10 minutes at a stretch. We can learn much from our dogs.

Essay Topic

Do you agree with Dan Bernstein's point of view on American vacations? Why or why not? Write an essay that summarizes (in your own words) Bernstein's point and explains why you agree or disagree with him, using support from the text, from your own knowledge or experience, or from examples.

English 099 Common Final Scoring Sheet

Name: _____

ID #: _____

CRN (course code): _____

4 = Strong
 3 = Satisfactory
 2 = Weak
 1 = Poor

First Reader: _____ 4 3 2 1

English 99 Learning Outcomes	4	3	2	1
COR-SLO 2: The essay contains a controlling idea (or thesis) that responds to the prompt.				
COR-SLO 3: The essay supports the main idea using fully developed reasons and examples.				
COR-SLO 3: The essay has a clear organization that avoids repeating ideas.				
COR-SLO 6: The essay demonstrates clear command of grammar and punctuation skills.				

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If appropriate,

Third Reader: _____ 4 3 2 1